



## Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

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**Carol Walter, Executive Director, CT Coalition to End Homelessness**

### **Testimony for the Appropriations Committee**

Good Afternoon My name is Carol Walter and I am the Executive Director of the CT Coalition to End Homelessness. We are here today because the Governor's deficit mitigation plan immediately enacts budget cuts to homeless and housing services, and proposes a deeper, 25% cut that the legislature will consider in special session next week: Cuts to people who have absolutely nowhere else to turn. Really...nowhere.

For several years, providers of services to homeless men, women and children and those most immediately at risk have reported a steady increase in both need, and the gravity of the circumstances which bring people to their doors and make it so difficult for them to exit. In 2008, anecdotal information showing the number of families seeking shelter and emergency housing services on the rise was supported by data here in CT and nationally which showed double digit increases in family homelessness. In 2009, bed occupancy reported by state funded homeless shelters rose from the unacceptable rate of around 90% to well over 100% by January. Just last month, the average bed usage at CT shelters exploded to over 107%, meaning we effectively have no emergency shelter safety net for the thousands of households who are losing their housing. Thousands will be turned away this winter, there is no question, and that is before devastating cuts, which will force organizations to scale back services and available beds throughout the state.

And federal stimulus dollars, which became available, to help prevent homelessness among those who are at imminent risk due to the deep economic recession will not meet the demand. Consider this, in just eight weeks since the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program became available in most communities, more than 1,500 households have been screened for services and more than 1,200 have been referred to providers having met initial HUD eligibility thresholds. This demand far exceeds projections and if it continues will exhaust available program slots within the first full year of services, perhaps less. The program was intended to be operational for three.

On behalf of all of them, we ask the Governor to reverse her rescissions to homeless/housing programs, and we plead with you to reject plans to destroy the thin safety net that remains. **It is the worst of times for our most vulnerable neighbors. We need the very best from all of you.**